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CBS Rates Praise on Special

By Lawrence Laurent

DETROIT—The controversy over the assassination of President Kennedy will probably never be settled. It will continue to be argued, just as men continue to argue over the authorship of the plays by Shakespeare; just as some men still debate the identity of President Lincoln's assassin.

No final answer is possible for some persons. And the conspiracy theory will continue to be persuasive to many persons.

For most reasonable men, however, the searching four-part CBS documentary on the Warren Commission Report should be satisfactory. This series of one-hour programs was distinguished by its deliberate and unhurried pace, its willingness to examine in detail each element of the controversy. This was undoubtdely the finest examination of this controversy that television has conducted. It left little new ground for others to explore.

Walter Cronkite probably came as close to the final conclusion as any man could come with his comments near the end of the third program. He said: "It is difficult to be totally content. Yet experience teaches all of us that any complex human event that is examined scrupulously, and in detail, will reveal improbabilities, inconsistencies, awkward gaps in our knowledge.

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"Real life is not all that tidy."

JUST ABOUT everyone in the investigation of Mr. Kennedy's death received a few lumps. Cronkite found deficiencies in the Commission, itself, particularly for its permitting the Secret Service and the FBI to investigate a case in which the efficiency of the agencies was in question.

Objections were raised over the continued silence of the Central Intelligence Agency and its possible relationship to assassin Lee Harvey Oswald.

CBS News slipped, itself, if only slightly in special pleading over the private ownership (by Life Magazine) of the 8-millimeter film of the assassination. All three television networks did bid for the ownership of that film and Life

favor of the "cultural documentary") has been given new life in recent weeks. The NBC report on Garrison is one example and the CBS series on the Warren Commission Report is another.

Perhaps we are seeing a return to the point-of-view documentary that evaluates a public issue. If such a trend is coming, the viewing public will be the winner.

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In its long report, CBS News handed out some lumps to New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison and it found critics of the Commission to be something less than persuasive.

Attorney-author Mark Lane ("Rush to Judgment") was found by CBS to be as reckless with facts as he had accused the Warren Commission of being.

Special credit goes to CBS for the skill with which it simulated the conditions of the assassination.

APPLAUSE must be given, also, for the willingness of CBS to give due credit to its competitor, NBC. The usual phrase, "another network," was avoided and NBC was identified for its report on the shakiness of the conspiracy case that has been constructed by Garrison.

Investigative reporting, which has been ignored or avoided in recent times (in